DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 224 865 CE 032 334

AUTHOR Wickett, R. E. Y.
TITLE The Application of the Learning Project Interview as a Method of Communicating Principles of Learning Theory to Facilitators of Adult Learning.
PUB DATE 82
NOTE 15p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; *Adult Learning; Adults; Educational Media; Independent Study; *Interviews; *Learning Experience; Learning Processes; *Learning Theories; Postsecondary Education; Program Descriptions; *Program Implementation
IDENTIFIERS *Learning Project Interview

ABSTRACT

The learning project interview is a group-interview technique that is useful for developing an awareness of the process of adult learning. Specifically, it provides insights concerning the types of things adults try to learn, the number of learning experiences they have, their methods of learning, and the sources of the subject matter that they attempt to learn. The learning project interview can be used with groups containing anywhere from 10 to 200 participants. First, participants are asked to list anything that they tried to learn during the past 12 months. After narrowing their list to include only learning projects that were deliberate, more than 7 hours in duration, and designed to retain a skill for at least 48 hours, participants are asked to select the one project that was most important to them. Next, participants provide information concerning the planning process they used during the learning experience, the main source of the information they learned, and the amount of time spent learning it. By sharing this information during a debriefing and discussion period, the adult learners become aware of their own learning processes as well as that of others. (MN)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED224865

THE APPLICATION OF THE LEARNING PROJECT INTERVIEW AS A METHOD OF COMMUNICATING PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING THEORY TO FACILITATORS OF ADULT LEARNING

R.E.Y. Wickett
Associate Professor
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

1982

CE 033 334

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

R.E.Y. Wickett

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

The work of Allen Tough (1971, 1979) has made a significant contribution to our view of adult learning. His original conceptualization and the many subsequent studies of significant, deliberate learning have provided fresh insights to learning theory. Facilitators of adult learning should be aware of the implications of the various learning project studies. The group interview was designed to provide this awareness for facilitators within a one hour time period.

A wide range of participants numbering between ten and 200 have been involved in numerous group interviews conducted by the author. Librarians, professors, seminarians, graduate students, in-service trainers, community college staff, and others have provided positive feedback on this process. The librarians were particularly responsive to this approach because they had encountered many persons who were involved in self-directed learning, an area which has not been explained as fully by learning theories. The community college's support staff who were not involved directly with programs indicated that this was an activity of interest to them because they could participate fully in an examination of their own learning.

It should be made clear that the group interview is not a method used for research purposes. This method is used for teaching purposes only and it is described thereby to participants.

The Interview

The group interview is similar to the original individual interview used by Tough (1971) with adaptations from the interview of Wickett (1978). Each participant is asked to use a clean sheet of paper to record confidential information. It is explained that any feedback to

the group will be in response to general questions within categories.

Participants are asked to record by brief title anything which they tried to learn at any time during the past 12 months. These titles are to be numbered in sequence as recorded. When no further titles are forthcoming, the participants are asked to review a list of subject matter areas (see Appendix A, Sheet 1) and of situations and resources (see Appendix A, Sheet 2). These lists remind most participants of areas of learning which can be added to their personal lists. Overheads may be used to display these and other lists to small or large groups.

The next task is for each participant to determine a project which fits Tough's (1979) criteria. The purpose of the project should be to gain and retain a certain knowledge or skill for at least 48 hours. The project should be deliberate, of seven hours duration or more and clearly focussed on the area of knowledge or skill (pp. 8-10).

It is suggested that participants choose the project which was most important to them or which fits into an appropriate category; for example, an appropriate category for in-service trainers might be an employment related project. Once the project is determined, it is recorded briefly in order to assist the recall of all aspects of the learning.

Participants are informed that the remainder of the interview will refer only to this project. They are asked to consider the planning process which involved what they would learn and how they would learn on a continuous basis from the beginning to the end of the project. They are asked to consult the list of planners (see Appendix A, Sheet 3) and to record who made the majority of the decisions concerning what

and how to learn. It is indicated after a few moments delay, that more than one may be recorded if they are "roughly equal" in their role in the planning of the project.

The following questions in the interview are concerned with the learning activity itself. Participants are asked to record the main source(s) of content or subject matter from the list provided (see Appendix A, Sheet 4). After a short delay, the possibility of more than one main source is introduced if two or more sources are considered to be "roughly equal" to this project. They are asked to record next the main method(s) of learning or "when the most important part of the learning occurred for them" as described on the list (see Appendix A, Sheet 5). Again, more than one should be recorded if they are roughly equal in this project. This means that the individual has benefited through the reception of credit towards a degree, certificate, diploma, licence, grade level or occupational status (Tough, 1979, p. 57).

Finally, an estimate of total time spent in all aspects of the learning project is requested. It is stressed that this is only an estimate which can be determined in various ways. One can calculate the time spent in each activity or estimate the time spent over an average week or month, then multiply by the appropriate number. This concludes the interview phase.

Debriefing and Discussion

Participants are asked to indicate their responses by raising their hands at appropriate times. On the occasion when this was done with a group of 200, a sample of 20 was chosen for the convenience

of the recorder. The responses are recorded in totals on newsprint sheets for the presentation of results throughout the remainder of the group session. This procedure provides a permanent record which is taped to the walls for review purposes.

Participants are asked first to indicate the range of their numbers of learning efforts. The author uses the ranges of 0 to 9, 10 to 19, 20 to 29 and 30 plus.

There are normally participants in all ranges but the 10 to 19 range is most frequently indicated. It is stated that the resulting table represents a limited number of efforts in comparison to what might emerge during an individual interview or if a learning diary were kept for 12 months. One should also state that the person who engaged in three efforts might have spent more time at those three than the person who was involved in many efforts. The number of efforts may change from year to year depending on the individual's learning style and life situation. Participants often find the number and variety of their learning efforts to be quite revealing.

The next step involves an indication of the main planner for the learning projects. The single main planner is requested first. It is important to remind those who recorded to move that one main planner to wait until mixed main planners are recorded in order. Table 1 provides a view of the possible appearance of results:

TABLE 1

Main Planner

Planner	Single	Mixed
1. Group (a) leader	1	2
(b) members	1	1
2. One person (a) expert	0	2
(b) non-expert	1	0
3. Object	0	1
4. Learner	3	3
5. Mixed		4

The results normally reflect the findings of Tough (1979) and others that approximately 80% of projects are planned by amateurs, 73% by learners themselves and only 20% by professionals (p. 193).

Participants indicate at this time the main source of subject matter or content for their learning project. Single main sources are recorded prior to mixed main sources of content. This exercise normally reflects the diversity of sources of content which learners use. Books and other written materials tend to be important source vehicles television and radio are seldom, if ever, mentioned. This can be a moment to reflect on possible changing learning patterns for persons who are growing to adulthood with "Sesame Street."

Main methods of learning are recorded next with single main method followed by mixed main method. This exercise has never failed to show the variety of ways in which people learn. There has been a consistently high number of mixed main methods in this group interview situation. Facillitators need to be aware that learning styles may differ in the group situation thus requiring the application of research different methods in any situation.

Participants indicate next their answers to the question concerning credit. There has always been a clear indication that credit has a low priority (approximately five percent) in learning projects in individual and group interviews (p. 194).

The final section on the number of hours of the learning project completes the responses in our debriefing. A number of ranges have been used, but the following appears to be the most useful: 7 to 50, 51 to 100, 101 to 200, 201 to 500, 501 to 1,000 and 1,000 plus. There is normally a wide range of responses. One hundred is the average number of hours as reported in Tough (1979) for learning projects (p. 192). It should be indicated at this time that the average learner conducts five projects in a twelve month period (p. 192).

Summary

The group interview is a useful technique for developing awareness of adult learning. Participants become more aware of their own learning and the learning of others. This awareness of learning will be useful in the improvement of one's own learning and of the facilitation of others' learning.

Please remember that there are a variety of issues which may arise in the debriefing process. These issues can be dealt with more effectively if the facilitator is aware of the studies which are described in Tough (1979) and in other volumes.

Self-directed learning assumes new importance for many persons after they see the results of the group interview process. Facilitators

can be encouraged to provide more opportunities for this type of learning in their classrooms.

It should be noted that the interview can be focussed on a particular type of project according to the situation. In-service trainers may examine projects related to employment. Librarians may select self directed projects. A particular focus for the project may facilitate more appropriate learning for the group.

You may wish to consider the use of the group interview for graduate students or for part-time instructors of adults. It has never failed to generate interest and thoughtful discussion.

REFERENCES

Tough, A.M. The adult's learning projects: a fresh approach to theory and practice in adult learning (2nd Ed.). Toronto: The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1979.

Wickett, R.E.Y. Adult learning projects related to spiritual growth. Unpublished Ed.D. dissertation, University of Toronto (OISE), 1977. Available in microfilm from the National Library of Canada.

APPENDIX A

Some things that people often learn about:

a sport or game

current events; public affairs; politics; peace; biography

home repairs; woodworking; home improvement project; decorating

a hobby or craft; collecting something; photography

raising a child; discipline; infant care; child's education

nature; agriculture; mathematics

effective writing; public speaking; literature

science; astronomy; man in space

health; physical fitness; personal finances

history; geography; travel; region, city or neighbourhood

psychology; effective relationships with people; groups; leadership; social skills

mechanical skills

some personal problem; mental health; an emotional problem; an illness or medical condition

various new careers; finding a new job

gardening

something related to a job responsibility or decision

musical instrument; singing; music appreciation

professional or technical competence; how to teach or supervise

some aspect of religion, ethics, philosophy, moral behaviour

current changes in society; the future; problems in cities; pollution

sociology; art; architecture

relationships with the opposite sex, within the family

economics; business

sensory awareness; human potential; communications; understanding oneself; efficiency

new techniques; a new way of doing something; an innovation

English; French; another language

Spiritual Growth

Efforts related to:

Home or family; organizations or clubs; Church or Synagogue:
teaching or writing outside of your job

Ways of Learning:

Introspection; meditation; prayer
reading a book, newspaper, magazine - in an area where you wanted to remember something.
any written item or publication of any kind

From:

a medical doctor; lawyer; counsellor; financial advisor; social worker; teacher; clergyman or priest or rabbi; spiritual leader;
direct insight or revelation

From:

documentaries or courses on television or radio; Television news or other programmes; radio; films

From:

friends or family; new acquaintances; a special kind of group - meeting or discussion

While at:

a conference; retreat; institute; short course or workshopl church or synagogue; college, university or school; museum or gallery; club

What about at your job in the past twelve months?

Planners

This sheet is concerned with the person or persons who were responsible on a day-to-day basis for deciding exactly what and how the learner went about learning at each session.

* * * * * * * * * * *

1. Some learners take part in a group where the decisions are taken by the members of the group together or by a leader or teacher.
2. Some learners work with one person who directs the learning activity. This person may be an expert in the area or a non-expert like a friend relative or acquaintance.
3. In some situations, an object directs the learner. An example of this would be a workbook, language lab., or programmed materials.
4. The learner may also make the decisions, although this does not exclude advice received from other sources.

Sheet 4

Main source of subject matter or content

1. Group, instructor or learners of group.
2. Friend, relative, or neighbour.
3. Expert.
4. Books, pamphlets, newspapers.
5. Television or radio.
6. Programmed materials
7. Displays, exhibits, museums, or galleries.

Methods of learning

Sheet 5

1. Reading.
2. Discussing.
3. Doing.
4. Observation.
5. Television viewing or radio listening
6. Reflection